



Dear Friend of Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area,

This is the first in a series of Newsletters that will be sent to parties interested in Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area, and the development of the Master Plan. This Newsletter includes articles on the following topics:

- About Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area
- Public Use of the Park and Wildlife Area Prior to the Completion of the Master Plan.
- Recent Work on the Property
- Preparations for the development of the Master Plan.
- The Master Planning Process and the Draft Public Involvement Plan.

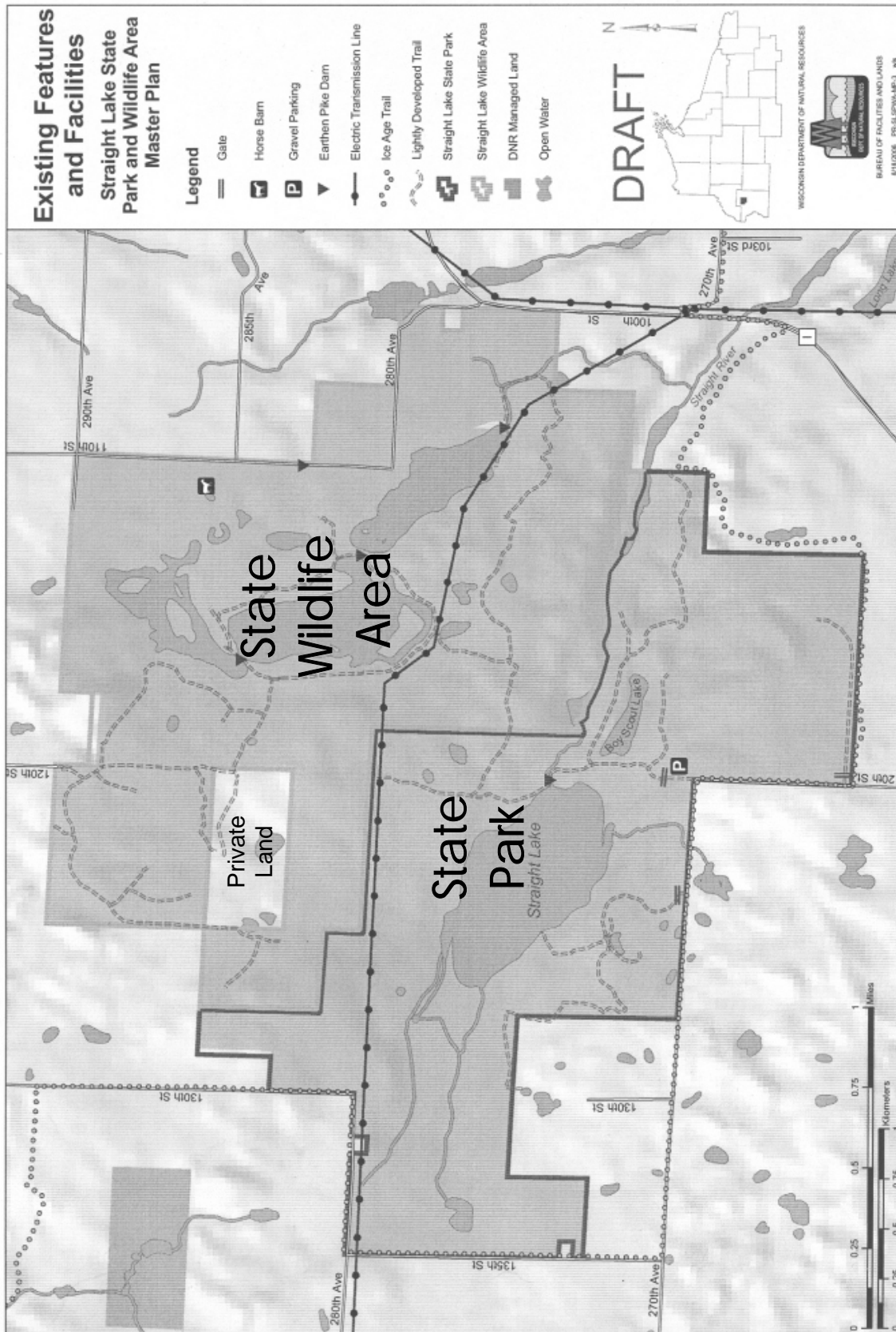
### About Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area

Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area is actually two separately designated properties that are adjacent to each other. The State Park and the State Wildlife Area are both approximately 1,400 acres, totaling 2,800 acres. The properties are located in northwestern Wisconsin in Polk County, and include portions of the townships of Luck and Bone Lake.

In 2002 the Department prepared a Feasibility Study to examine the potential purchase of the property and the creation of a State Wildlife Area and State Park. The Feasibility Study also proposed that a portion of the land to be dedicated as an Ice Age Trail Area and another part of the property be dedicated as a State Natural Area. With approval from Governor Doyle and the Natural Resources Board, the state acquired the property in 2005.

The two properties include one natural and four man-made lakes totaling 329 acres of surface water. There are 222 acres of high quality wetlands, as well as perched bogs, ephemeral ponds, and fens that support a diversity of plant and animal communities.

The project area also contains one of the most distinctive glacier-formed tunnel surface channels in the Midwest. This feature is located on the southeast side of the project area along the Straight River.



The upland areas are primarily vegetated with northern hardwoods, a scattering of red and white pine, and some crop /grass land. A portion of the upland area approximately 850 acres in size contains forest that is approaching old growth characteristics, and will be considered for dedication as a State Natural Area. A diversity of wildlife species inhabit or visit the property, and several rare or endangered species have been identified, including: trumpeter swans, bald eagles, and cerulean warblers.

Over the years the majority of this 2800 acre property has seen a variety of human uses, yet today the property has an undisturbed look to it and evidence of past use is mostly gone. These past uses included farming, road and trail development, a Boy Scout Camp situated along Straight Lake, and the beginnings of a golf course community development. Today, the only evidence of these previous uses are, several miles of trails / dirt roads, a remnant horse barn structure, 140 acres of cleared grasslands / crop lands and the three man-made ponds on the northeast side of the project area.

The 2002 Feasibility Study provided a number of general recommendations regarding the future management of the project area that will be further defined and formalized as part of the development of the Master Plan.

The Feasibility Study included the following recommendations:

- Protect the wild lake complex, including Straight Lake, the Straight River, and rare plant communities on the property.
- Manage part of the property for a variety of game and non-game wildlife species.
- Provide for a wide variety of public recreational opportunities.
- Dedicate a portion of the property as an Ice Age Trail Area.
- Dedicate part of the property as a State Natural Area.
- Provide opportunities on the Ice Age Trail for foot travel, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.
- Provide other nature-based activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing, snowshoeing, outdoor education, photography, berry picking, and scientific study.

Based on these recommendations, the next step in determining the future management of these properties will be the development of the Master Plan. Additional information about the master planning process and opportunities for public input is included in the Newsletter on pages 5-7

## **Public Uses Allowed Prior to the Completion of the Master Plan**

The Department held a public information meeting on June 7, 2005 at the Village of Luck Municipal Building to discuss the recent public acquisition of Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area. DNR staff answered questions and received input on a wide range of issues related to the property and its future management.

Other topics discussed included the interim public uses allowed prior to the development of a property Master Plan. It was explained that the public would be welcome to enter the Park and Wildlife Area during the interim period, however access would be walk-in only, and no camping or motorized vehicle use (including snowmobiles) would be allowed.

## **Wildlife Area**

All State Wildlife Area rules, as well as the recommendations of the 2002 Feasibility Study will apply to this new property during the period before the Master Plan is completed and approved. The public is welcome to hike the property and walk in to view wildlife, hunt, and fish per the regular hunting and fishing season requirements.

### **2006 Hunting in the Wildlife Area**

The wildlife area will be open for all deer seasons in 2006, including archery, nine-day gun, muzzleloader, and the December four-day "antlerless- only" deer hunt. Portable tree stands are allowed for deer hunting provided they are removed each day and do not damage the tree.

The wildlife area is also open for small game, waterfowl, and turkey hunting, as well as trapping. Other than the nine-day gun and muzzleloader deer seasons, hunters may only cross the boundary between the state park and the wildlife area to retrieve wounded game. For more information on hunting state owned properties, hunters should refer to the 2006 hunting regulation pamphlets.

## **State Park**

All State Park rules, as well as the recommendations of the 2002 Feasibility Study apply to this new property prior to the completion and approval of the Master Plan. The public is welcome to hike the property and walk in to fish per the regular fishing season requirements. Carry-in use of canoes and small non-motorized boats will be allowed in the state park on Straight Lake and Boy Scout Lake. Visitors will be allowed to park in one of several perimeter parking areas near existing gates and walk in to the park area.

### **2006 Hunting in the State Park**

Limited Hunting is allowed in Straight Lake State Park. In 2006, deer hunting will be allowed but limited to the nine-day November gun season followed by the eleven-day muzzle loader season. At this time archery hunting is not permitted, nor is any other type of hunting or trapping. Portable tree stands are allowed for deer hunting provided they are removed each day and do not damage trees.

A public hearing was conducted last October to gather comments on deer hunting opportunities in Straight Lake State Park in 2006. The meeting was held in Spooner in conjunction with a public hearing on statewide deer hunting proposals. There was strong support for a limited deer hunt in the new state park.

Numerous other Wisconsin state parks allow public deer hunting as a tool to manage deer populations. In the absence of any deer hunting, large properties such as Straight Lake State Park become a deer refuge, quickly resulting in deer densities that are significantly higher than population goals. Biologists are concerned about the negative effects of too many deer on the natural ecology of the property, as well as the potential for crop depredation on adjacent private lands and the increased chances of a disease outbreak.

## Recent Work on the State Park and Wildlife Area

In the time period prior to the development of a Master Plan, DNR property managers and staff are currently performing or have completed the following work on the State Park and Wildlife Area properties:

- Location of and signing the property boundaries.
- Clean up and removal of barb wire fencing, debris, and building remnants (except the abandoned horse barn).
- Reconstruction of the three impoundment's earthen dikes and the Straight Lake dam.

### Reconstruction of the Dikes

There are three impoundments (man-made ponds) located in the State Wildlife Area that were created in the early 1960's by the construction of three earthen dikes. There is also an old rock dam at the southeast outlet of Straight Lake located in the State Park. The three impoundment earthen dikes and the Straight Lake rock dam all need to be reconstructed to meet current design regulations and permitting requirements. As this work is necessary to insure public safety and is required by law, it is being done prior to the development of a Master Plan.

Water level control structures will be installed in the three impoundment dikes to give wildlife managers the option of regulating the water levels of the impoundments to improve wetland habitat, and to facilitate spilling excess water during heavy precipitation or runoff events. Management decisions regarding the possible manipulation of the water levels will later be made with public input as part of the master planning process

Reconstruction of the three impoundment dikes will require the temporary lowering of the existing water levels. Following construction, the three impoundments will be allowed to refill with rainfall runoff and snowmelt. The reconstruction of the dam at the south end of Straight Lake will be accomplished using techniques that will not require lowering the water level of the ecologically sensitive lake. Dewatering of the three impoundments began in June and continued throughout the summer. The dike / dam reconstruction work will proceed after the engineering plans are completed and the required permits have been secured.

The stability of the dike at the upper (northern) impoundment was of concern due to its' steep and eroded sides, and seeping water. DNR staff began lowering the water level of all 3 impoundments to allow the reconstruction of the dikes and the installation of control structures. It was planned that the water level would be lowered in a series of steps by creating spillways on all three impoundments in order to drain the water at a controlled rate and volume into an adjacent area, in order to minimize potential damage from erosion.

Unfortunately, the upper dike had a more substandard construction than anticipated and the spillway opened and enlarged, allowing the water to exit the pond much faster and in a much greater volume than planned. The water released from the upper impoundment passed through the middle impoundment, a wooded gully and into the Straight River. The force of the water eroded the gully, toppled a number of trees and deposited the eroded soil and rock material over an area of wetland vegetation on the north side of the Straight River. The silt-laden water then drained into Straight River.

A team of DNR specialists have developed a plan to repair the erosion damage and restoration work is currently underway. Access to the eroded gully and the affected wetland area is limited by steep terrain and dense vegetation. Consequently, DNR staff is performing repair and restoration work in a manner that avoids additional disturbance to the area.

The work of reconstructing the three dikes in the Wildlife Area is expected to proceed this fall and next spring, and the reconstruction of the Straight Lake dam is expected to proceed next summer.

## Preparations for the Development of the Master Plan

A Master Plan describes the authorized land management, resource protection, facility development, and management of recreational use on a department property. In other words, it is a plan that spells out how a DNR property will be managed and used, how it will look, and what benefits it will provide in the future.

The process for the development of Master Plans for DNR properties ensures that integrated, ecologically-based, resource management principles are applied to Department lands while providing appropriate recreational opportunities for the public. With your help, a Master Plan will be developed to set the course for management in Straight Lake State Park and State Wildlife Area over the next 15-20 years and beyond.

Over the summer and fall months, a great deal of preparatory work for the Master Plan has been under way. In order to make informed master planning decisions, an intensive resource inventory is needed. The DNR has been developing maps and gathering important information regarding the natural resources of the property and the property's suitability for various types of recreational uses. This information will be used to guide and inform decisions made during the development of the Master Plan.

Additionally, the Bureau of Endangered Resources has been conducting biological field studies. Once the inventory and analysis work is complete, that information will be summarized and made available to the public in a report referred to as the Property and Regional Analysis. This preparatory planning phase will be completed by later this month.

At that point, the master planning team will begin Step 1 of the master planning process (see the Draft Public Involvement Plan on page 6). Step 1 includes the development of a Draft Vision Statement and a set of Draft of Property Goals. The team will also develop a preliminary map and written text describing and evaluating the Department's "Preferred Management Alternative," along with a description and evaluation of several other possible Management Alternatives. We anticipate that we will be ready to present the "Preferred Alternative" and other initial concepts to the public for review and comment by spring of 2007.

As these alternatives are finalized, we will send another Newsletter to confirm a date, time, and location for a public meeting / listening session that will formally launch the public involvement portion of the Master Plan. That meeting will also be announced in the state and local news media. We hope you can come and share your thoughts and ideas as together we chart a course for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area. Those unable to attend in person will have the option of providing their comments by mail or via the Master Plan's web site.

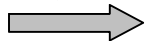
## Draft Public Involvement Plan

The following Draft Public Involvement Plan describes the steps in the master planning process and the various opportunities and ways members of the public may provide input during the development of the Master Plan. The Draft Public Involvement Plan is being presented for public review and comment. Please direct any comments to Jeff Krueger at the address or email address indicated on page 11.

We anticipate that the public master planning process will begin in spring of 2007 and will take approximately eight months to complete. The actual length of time needed to complete each step of the Master Plan's development and to obtain approval by the Natural Resources Board will depend on the range and complexity of issues that arise in the planning process. Should you choose to get involved, you will have a number of opportunities to provide input at each major step in the master planning process as indicated below.

**Step 1-** Considering the research and data gathered in preparation for the Master Plan, and public input received at the 6-7-05 public information meeting, DNR staff will develop a Draft Vision Statement, a set of Draft Property Goals, and a proposed Preferred Management Alternative, along with several Management Alternatives for the future management and development of the properties.

**PUBLIC  
INPUT**



The public has an opportunity to provide input on the Draft Vision Statement, Draft Property Goals, Management Alternatives, and proposed Preferred Management Alternative at a public meeting, by mail, or through the Master Plan web site.

**Step 2-** Considering the input received during Step 1, DNR staff will develop a Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment, including an annotated map of the property with text describing the proposed approach to managing the property and assessing any significant environmental affects.

**PUBLIC  
INPUT**

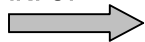


The public has an opportunity to provide input on the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment at a public meeting, by mail, or through the Master Plan web site.

**Step 3-** Considering the input received during Step 2, DNR staff will revise the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment prior to submitting the plan to the Natural Resources Board for review.

**Step 4-** The Natural Resources Board reviews the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Assessment and makes an approval decision on the plan.

**PUBLIC  
INPUT**



The public has an opportunity to comment at the Natural Resources Board meeting before the Board votes to approve or deny the Master Plan.

### **Public Involvement Plan- Communication Methods:**

- **Direct Mail** – The Department will establish a mailing list to keep interested parties aware of activities in the planning process, as well as any upcoming opportunities for public involvement.
- **Public Meetings** – The Department will organize and facilitate two public meetings / listening sessions during the process of developing the Master Plan. These meetings will be publicly noticed statewide and will be held in the vicinity of the properties.
- **News Releases** – The Department will issue news releases regarding upcoming public meetings and the availability of Draft Master Plan written materials and maps being released for public review and comment.
- **Web Page** – The Department will establish an Internet web page for the Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area Master Plan to provide an additional avenue for sharing and receiving communications. The web page will include written materials, drafts of management proposals, and property resource maps. These resources will provide the public with an overview of the master planning process, property resources, and use.
- **Government to Government Consulting** – Department staff will work directly with tribal representatives and other governments including counties and other local, state, and federal governments.

### **How the DNR Uses Your Input in the Planning Process**

To develop an effective master plan, the Department will listen to many voices. Neighboring landowners, concerned individuals, conservation groups, recreation users, commercial interests, elected officials, tribal representatives, and other government agencies are all encouraged to participate. Input received at each major step in the Master Plan's development will be considered as the Plan is developed.

During this process, decisions will be made based on:

- the land's resource capabilities,
- the role of the property in its local and regional context,
- applicable federal and state laws,
- administrative and DNR Codes,
- DNR design standards
- policies and missions of the State Park and Wildlife programs,
- consultations with tribal representatives,
- consideration of public input,
- the professional expertise of DNR managers.

A broad range of interests will be listened to and considered in the development of the Master Plan. Final decision making responsibility and authority rests with the DNR's citizen policy-making Natural Resources Board.

The Draft Public Involvement Plan is being provided for public review and comment. Please direct any comments to me at the address or email address indicated below. We welcome any comments you may have about how to improve the Public Involvement Plan.



## We Welcome Your Input!

We will welcome your comments as Master Plan begins to take shape. Comments may be submitted through the Master Plan's web site, by mail (see address below) or by attending the public information meetings.

If you know of others who would like to receive future mailings regarding the Master Plan for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area, please ask them to contact me. Requests to be added to the mailing list must come directly from the requesting party.

Also, please contact me if you **do not** wish to receive future mailings or emails regarding the Master Plan for Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area.

In the meantime, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your interest in Straight Lake State Park and Wildlife Area.

Sincerely,

**Jeff Krueger**

JEFF KRUEGER

Public Contact Person for the Straight Lake State Park & Wildlife Area- Master Plan

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